DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 063 SO 017 082

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TITLE Leadership. ERIC Digest No. 26.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Boulder, Colo.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Dec 85
CONTRACT 400-83-0012
NOTE 4p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Smith Research Center, Suite 120, 2805 East Tenth Street, Bloomington, IN 47405.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Futures (of Society); *Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; Personality Assessment; Personality Development
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

An ERIC digest provides general information to help educators, students, and others evaluate their own capacities for leadership. Material is divided into six substantive sections. "What is leadership?" provides definitions of the concept, discusses differences between leadership and management and considers requisites for effective leadership. "How and why does one become a leader?" considers the notion that people are born leaders and have recognizable leadership qualities. "What separates the leaders from others?" considers the major characteristics of leaders, including that they are vision and goal centered, have drive and power to accomplish their mission, and have the ability to become totally involved with the process of accomplishing their mission. "What are some typical competency characteristics of leaders?" presents the results of an interview with 90 successful leaders. "Who are some present leaders in education: Do they have these competencies?" profiles four current educational leaders. A final section, "What skills will leaders need in the future?" describes future leadership skills as including the ability to focus on the present and future, to bridge the gap among different interest groups, and monitor and interpret information. A list of resources concludes the paper. (LP)

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LEADERSHIP

ERIC Digest No. 26

by

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SO017082

December 1985

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by Sydney J.Meredith

This digest on leadership provides general information to help educators, students, and others evaluate their own capacities for leadership. It includes information that they can apply directly. For example, it provides to principals information useful for identifying and developing teacher leadership, which teachers can also use to expand student leadership.

Having capable leaders has always been important in the past, but is even more important today for a number of reasons having to do with the complexities that exist in the world, rapid change in all aspects of life, and new technologies that affect the future.

Leadership is especially needed on the current education scene. Many recent reports investigating educational reform in the United States focus on the mediocrity of education today. Some of the many concerns are that student scores have dropped, there are millions of functional illiterates, and there are thousands of high school dropouts (Naisbitt 1982). Good leadership is crucial to turning education around.

What is leadership?

The concept of leadership has many facets. First, there is guidance at the forefront by a head person who offers a vision and gives direction for reaching goals. Second, followers voluntarily give responsibility for direction to that head person. Leadership involves the notion that there is one who *wants* to lead and who influences those who *want* to follow (Bennis and Nanus 1985, Bothwell 1983, and Cunningham 1985).

Leadership differs from management. Management forces the follower to comply through extrinsic rewards or punishments. In contrast, leaders share a vision with others who, by their free will, follow. Leadership suggests that followers have trust and faith in their leaders and believe in the vision and direction they provide. Leadership, then, is based on intrinsic kinds of rewards for followers (Bennis and Nanus 1985).

Bennis and Nanus state that effective leadership implies having the emotional and spiritual resources to inspire followers so that they feel that what they are doing is relevant, significant, and worthwhile. Leaders have the ability to attract, empower, inspire, and energize people. Followers tend to identify with their leaders and personify them. Leadership, through persuasion rather than coercion, draws out commitment to a vision (Bennis and Nanus 1985).

Two other authors offer brief definitions of leadership. Although Cunningham notes that leadership is really too complex to fully understand and define, he briefly states that leadership is "the exercise of influence" (Cunningham 1985, 17). Osborne views leadership as a process, stating that it is a "process designed to maximize the contributions of individuals for their own benefit and that of the organizations to which they belong" (Osborne 1984, 3).

How and why does one become a leader?

The theory before the 20th century was that people were "born" leaders; that is, they were born with innate leadership traits. Another theory was that leaders rose to the occasion when a situation demanded it. However, these theories are not substantiated by much of the recent research. Research into the traits of past historical leaders reveals numerous varying traits—so many exclusive leadership traits that it is impossible to categorize them all (Bothwell 1983). Fujii states that "numerous studies on the personalities of leaders failed to find any consistent pattern of traits which would permit the identification of leaders"(Fujii 1975, 14). Firth states that "leaders do not possess common traits or consistent patterns. Nor is it possible to predict potential for leadership on the basis of personality, intelligence, stature, or scholarship" (Firth 1976, 327).

In contrast to the earlier theories, authorities on the study of leadership indicate that most people have leadership potential and, further, that they can develop leadership qualities. Bennis and Nanus state that "major capacities and competencies of leadership can be learned and that 'nurture' is far more important than nature in determining who becomes a successful leader" (Bennis and Nanus 1985, 223). Bothwell (1983) supports this view.

As to why one becomes a leader, Cunningham makes an analogy between wanting to become a leader and a mountain climber who has an adventurous and challenging spirit, stating that "climbers seek out mountains because they are there" (Cunningham 1985, 18). In addition, leaders are self-actualizers committed to a vision or dream that they want to see carried out.

What separates the leaders from others?

The major characteristic among leaders is that they are essentially "vision/goal centered." Knowing what needs to be done, as well as why, how, where, and when, these leaders share their visions with others. Having the drive, energy, and power to accomplish their mission, they act (rather than react) to make things happen. In addition, they are capable communicators of their visions to others. Bennis and Nanus state that "leadership is what gives an organization its vision and its ability to translate that vision into reality" (Bennis and Nanus 1985, 20).

In addition to vision, leaders become totally involved with the process itself when accomplishing the mission. Akin to Zen philosophy, they assume a playful attitude, becoming caught up in their work, which to them is adventurous and results in fun and enjoyment.

What are some typical competency characteristics of leaders?

Interviewing 90 successful top leaders, including company executives, public figures, college presidents, coaches, and orchestra conductors, Bennis and Nanus found that leaders embodied four areas of competence. They all (1) had a vision which encompassed goals and objectives and outcomes; (2) communicated and gave meaning and

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organization of the vision to others; (3) established a feeling of trust within their organizations and maintained an atmosphere of accountability, predictability, and reliability; and (4) had a positive self-concept that encompassed respect, regard, and worth.

The leaders had a number of common human relations skills. For example, they tended to accept people as they are, to trust others, to treat those close to them courteously, and to approach relationships in terms of the present instead of the past. In addition, they themselves did not need constant approval from others. These leaders also possessed the attitude of childlike enthusiasm, spontaneity, and imagination. Their attitude was positive, focusing on success and interpreting failure as a learning process (Bennis and Nanus 1985).

Other research into leadership traits reveals the interpersonal skills of many leaders. For example, leaders have a number of social skills that enhance others' feelings of personal worth and importance and that encourage members of the group to develop close relationships (Baird 1983). Friedman (1980) identified interpersonal skills leaders need, which include showing empathy toward what others think and feel, being flexible, confident, and relaxed, and persuading and influencing others.

Who are some present leaders in education: Do they have these competencies?

Kaplan profiles four current educational leaders and identifies a number of characteristics embodied by all four. The four outstanding educational leaders are Gregory Anrig, Head, Educational Testing Service; Ernest Boyer, President, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; Bill Honig, Jr., Superintendent of Public Instruction for California; and Albert Shanker, President, American Federation of Teachers.

These four leaders all posses the leadership competencies described by Bennis and Nanus. They all have an identified future-directed mission toward better education, are good communicators, and have good self-regard and healthy egos. Kaplan also noted other common abilities. For example, they possess exceptional memories, are keen readers, seek information, and are expressive and fluent public speakers (Kaplan 1985).

Although Kaplan profiles only four leaders, he ends his article on an optimistic note, offering an impressive list of present and future leaders and stating that, "Rising in the late 1980s is a remarkable complement of educators, commentators, and education-absorbed politicians whose informed intellects, unconventional imaginations, and high levels of energy would stamp them as obvious leaders in any field" (Kaplan 1985, 16).

What skills will leaders need in the future?

Although all other abilities and skills are subordinate to goal-centeredness discussed earlier, there are several skills the leader will particularly need in order to operate in the future. These include: (1) focusing on the present and the future simultaneously; (2) bridging gaps between different interest groups; (3) scanning, monitoring, and interpreting information and events; (4) appraising everyday events and passing judgment on a range of matters; (5) using their intuition to process information; (6) managing their images and behavior; and (7) teaching others about the mission, goals, and objectives that they deem worthy (Cunningham 1985).

Conclusion

From the information presented in this digest, we can generalize that many leaders are made, not born; the concept of leadership implies voluntary followership; most leaders have certain common characteristics, goal-centeredness being the most important; leaders share their visions with and get commitments from others; and capable educational leaders exist today, with others on the horizon.

RESOURCES

Following is a bibliography of resources, including references in this Digest. Those entries followed by an ED number are in the ERIC system and are available in microfiche and/or papercopy from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For price information write EDRS, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, VA 22210.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, Department of Education, under contract no. 400-83-0012. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or ED.